



Paul J. Diodati
Director

Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Marine Fisheries

251 Causeway Street, Suite 400

Boston, Massachusetts 02114

(617)626-1520

fax (617)626-1509



DMF Amends Sea Bass Trip Limits Again Effective Monday May 21, 2001, Trip Limits increased to 250 lbs. with 3 no-fishing days (Thurs., Fri. & Sat.)

The recent decision to drop the sea bass trip limit from 1,500 lbs. to 150 lbs. has been amended. The new limit will be 250 lbs. per day with three no-fishing days: Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Consequently the 150 lb. limit that went into effect on Saturday May 19 (as previously announced) will be increased to 250 lbs. on Monday, May 21, 2001. This limit and the no-fishing days will remain in effect until the regional quota is reached when the trip limit will be dropped to zero. The fishery will re-open on July 1 with fishing allowed all seven days and a trip limit of 1,000 lbs.

The Director decided to make this last-minute change based on comments received from fishermen and dealers about the impacts of the emergency action. This action was imposed on the states by ASMFC to prevent a premature closure of the sea bass fishery and required states to drop the trip limits once 40% of the quarterly quota was reached. **All states were required to enact rules that would limit fishermen to either 150 lbs./day or 1,000 lbs. per week.** DMF staff examined many options and tried to devise strategies that would provide the maximum benefit to the state's fishermen while ensuring the rules were enforceable and would result in high compliance. The original decision to have a seven-day per week fishery at 150 lbs. per day was made to maximize the benefits across all permit holders. This decision to increase the daily trip limit to 250 lbs. and take commensurate days-off was made to provide benefits to those fishermen who are making directed trips on black sea bass. Many commercial fishermen reached DMF and commented that the 150 lbs. limit was economically too small to allow any directed trips on sea bass.

DMF recognizes that these rule changes can result in confusion as well as disruption of fishing activities. However, fishermen and dealers are urged to demonstrate patience during these tumultuous times of increasing abundance and restrictive quotas. Black sea bass - like fluke, scup and many other species - is rebounding thanks to strong conservation measures among all states during the past few years.

ASMFC Black Sea Bass Amendment 13 Public Hearing Wednesday June 6, 6:30 p.m. at Mass. Maritime Auditorium in Buzzards Bay

DMF urges all commercial fishermen who fish for sea bass and dealers to attend the upcoming public hearing to discuss interstate sea bass management.

The ASMFC has developed a list of options to be included in the Public Information Document (PID) for Amendment 13 to the Black Sea Bass Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The PID will focus on the long-term management of the commercial black sea bass fishery. Currently, black sea bass is jointly managed by the Commission, through its Black Sea Bass FMP, and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, through Amendment 9 to the Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass FMP. These plans manage the commercial black sea bass fishery through a quota that is divided among four three-month periods. Commercial black sea bass landings are monitored weekly to ensure the timely closure of the fisheries once the quota for each period is landed. The PID presents a number of options to address pre-mature closures and regional allocations, including (1) allocation into two sub-regions (Maine through New York, and New Jersey through North Carolina); (2) a state-by-state quota system; and (3) quota allocations by separate permit categories. The Board has identified the state-by-state quota system as the preferred management approach.

Once the Commission receives public comment on the PID, the Council and the Commission will be developing a joint Public Hearing Draft of Amendment 13. Approval of this document will most likely occur in late June/early July at either the Council's or Commission's respective meeting weeks. Following this approval, a series of public hearings will be held, with final Amendment approval slated for late fall. The Commission's PID can be obtained by contacting Vanessa Jones, ASMFC Administrative Assistant, at (202) 289-6400, or via the Commission's web site at <http://www.asmfc.org>. For more information, please contact Robert Beal, Fisheries Management Plan Coordinator, at (202) 289-6400.